

## Captain James Cook (1728-1779)



Navigator and explorer of the Pacific and Antarctic, born in 1728 in Yorkshire, England. From an early age Cook had an uncanny command of mathematics. Around the age of seventeen he applied for a job on a collier (coal transport ship) and learned his trade on runs from Newcastle to London and into the Baltic and North Seas. He joined the Royal Navy in 1755 at the age of 27. His extraordinary skills at navigation and cartography soon gained him a promotion.

In 1768 Cook was appointed commander of the H.M.S. Endeavour to take members of the Royal Society on an expedition to Tahiti, where they would record the transit of Venus across the sun and engage in general exploration. The Endeavour was a refitted collier and proved well suited to exploration because of its large capacity for cargo and shallow draft. Cook's second ship, the H.M.S. Resolution, was also a refitted collier.

Captain James Cook promoted the practice of feeding his crew sauerkraut and lime juice to fight scurvy, based on the studies done by Dr. James Lind in 1747, and insisted his crew wash themselves and their possessions, and exercise on the open deck regularly. It was not until 1795 that lime juice rations were provided for all sailors in the Royal Navy, and to this day, British sailors are known as 'Limeys'. Vitamin C would not be discovered and isolated until 1932 when W.A. Waugh and C.G. King at the University of Pittsburgh, and Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, a Hungarian scientist, finally identified this important part of the human diet. It is interesting to note, only primates and guinea pigs are unable to manufacture vitamin C on their own, having lost the genetic information necessary to create this important dietary component.



During Cook's first voyage of exploration, which began in 1768 and finished in 1771, he recorded and mapped many regions of the South Pacific unknown to Europeans. So intrigued by the large collection of botanical specimens collected by Banks and Solander at one stop along the east coast of Australia, he named the natural harbour 'Botany Bay'.

Upon his return to England, Cook's fame was almost overshadowed by Banks, but his reputation in the Royal Navy was secured. With almost no time at home, a second mission was planned. Banks made such extraordinary demands for outfitting for the ship that Cook finally had to object. The Admiralty, hearing both sides of the case, decided in favour of Cook.

On Cook's second journey, in his famous ship Resolution, he sailed farther south than any other European. He circled Antarctica, but the ice surrounding the continent prevented the sighting of land. The existence of Antarctica as a land mass remained unproved until 1840. He returned to England in 1775 and was promoted to Captain, and elected to the [Royal Society](#).

Cook's third mission was to search for a northern route between the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. For this voyage, the ship's Master was a young William Bligh who, like Cook, was brilliant with navigation. Despite their best efforts, no navigable route was found. They did however explore the west coast of what would become British Columbia, and made a return visit to Hawaii, then known as the 'Sandwich Islands'. Due to a series of unfortunate events and misunderstandings, Cook was killed by the Hawaiians in 1779. His ship returned to England eighteen months later, in October of 1780.